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ABSTRACT

The Special Education Program at West Virginia University offers graduate degree/teacher certification programs in mental retardation, learning disabilities, and behavior disorders. Practicum experiences are included in the program, and have created a need for faculty supervision that could not be met by existing resources. A program was designed to provide training for field-based cooperating teachers to develop their observation, supervisory, and evaluation skills. The training consisted of three weekly sessions which included lecture/discussion activities, guided practice, and probe assessments. The practicum experience is organized around competency-based teacher education principles, and 50 target competencies must be demonstrated by the student and documented by the cooperating teacher. University-based practicum supervisors maintain periodic contact with students and cooperating teachers, observe and evaluate students in classroom settings, and assign final grades. Proposed evaluation procedures for the project include ratings of the cooperating teachers' supervisory performance, data analysis of the competencies demonstrated by students, observation of students by cooperating teachers and supervisors, etc. (Forty-one references are listed.) (JDD)

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DEVELOPING PRACTICUM SUPERVISION SKILLS IN COLLEAGUE TEACHERS

National studies have revealed that present patterns of teacher supply and demand are pointing to critical teacher shortages in many areas by the 1990s (Darling-Hammond, 1984). The attrition rate of qualified, experienced teachers has grown from 30% to 60% in recent years due to teacher dissatisfaction with bureaucratic interference with teaching and lack of administrative support (AFT, 1983; NEA, 1983). A series of reports calling for reform in education have stressed the need for restructuring of teacher education programs (ATE, 1986; Carnegie Report, 1986; Holmes Group Report, 1986; NCATE Report, 1985). Reform of teacher training programs is seen as a critical component of the movement to improve the American system of public education.

The preparation of educational personnel to serve handicapped students is a national priority. Several studies have shown a shortage of appropriately trained teachers for special education programs across the country (Helge, 1981; Smith-Davis et. al., 1984; Sontag & Button, 1980). These shortages are compounded by the use of temporary out-of-field permits to hire staff, a practice that threatens the quality of services (Smith-Davis, 1985; Pipho, 1986). The demands of teaching, coupled with the stresses of a special education program, leads to "burnout" and teacher turnover (Bina, 1981; Marrs, 1983). The problem is especially critical in rural areas, where attrition rates for special educators may be as high as 50% yearly (Helge, 1984). In addition, many students enrolled in special education teacher training programs are already employed as teachers and are unable to pursue full-time studies (Spencer, Noel & Boyer-Schick, 1985). These problems must be addressed by personnel preparation programs if the continuing demands for special educators are to be met.

The Special Education Program at West Virginia University has been state approved and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accredited to offer graduate degree/teaching certification programs in Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities and Behavior Disorders for two decades. These programs are available on campus and also at off-campus locations through the Office of Extension and Continuing Education. Coursework is offered at five (5) sites in the WVU service area comprised of 33 counties in the northern half of the state. All classes are offered in the late afternoon and evening to allow students employed as teachers on temporary permits to attend.

Practicum experiences have been available during the academic year, across summer sessions, and more recently on-the-job. Over 50% of the current student enrollment is off-campus and fully 90% of all students are employed full-time in teaching positions, creating a heavy demand for non-traditional practicum experiences. Practicum enrollment data indicate that the majority of students request the summer or on-the-job practicum options.

The summer practicum experience is dependent upon the willingness of county school systems to offer summer programs for handicapped students and the ability of the university to provide qualified supervisory personnel. The demand for summer practicum has reached the point where the Special Education Program no longer has the resources to locate enough placements or to provide sufficient supervision. In addition, many students who have family responsibilities find it difficult to schedule six (6) weeks away from home during the summer months to complete practicum requirements. In 1983, WVU was awarded a Personnel Preparation Grant to develop and implement a Clinical Practicum Project to provide practicum experiences in on-the-job settings. The availability of clinical practicum has reduced the demand for summer practicum, but the overall increase in enrollment and the increased demand for on-the-job practicum experiences has created a need for supervision that cannot be met by existing faculty resources.

Institutions of higher education have traditionally failed to commit necessary resources to practicum supervision (ATE, 1986a). Supervisory duties are given low priority status by faculty members, with the result that inadequate time and effort is devoted to working with practicum students (McIntire, 1983). Studies have shown that the cooperating teacher is the key to effective practicum supervision (Zeichner, 1980; Zimpher et al, 1980). Practicing master teachers have years of training and experience to use in supervising practicum experiences (Blumberg, 1980). They also have knowledge of a particular school system, including administrative policies, available resources, and contact persons. But teachers need direct instruction in skills for observing lessons, providing feedback, and evaluating teaching performance to be most effective as supervisors (Emans, 1983). Effective practicum operations require a training program for cooperating teachers to develop supervisory skills systematically with practice and feedback over time.

PROGRAM CONTENT

The on-the-job practicum program at West Virginia University consists of a pre-practicum orientation session and a practicum experience provided to eligible students pursuing teaching certification in Special Education in the areas of Mental Retardation, Learning Disabilities, or Behavior Disorders. This practicum experience is offered upon completion of all other required coursework and only to students currently working in the field on temporary teaching permits. It meets all guidelines for professional experiences in teacher education established by the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE, 1986a).

Program Competencies

The practicum experience is organized around competency-based teacher education (CBTE) principles. CBTE is an instructional delivery system in which competencies are specified in behavioral terms and alternative assessment activities are scheduled (Houston & Howram, 1972). Teacher training programs that are competency based provide a flexible structure permitting individualization to meet specific student needs (Blackhurst, 1977). They also offer more objective assessment procedures for measuring student competency attainment by zeroing in on those skills in which students need more practice and refinement and by facilitating identification of alternative activities for demonstrating improvement (Berdine, Cegelka & Kelley, 1977). Fifty (50) program competencies must be demonstrated by the student during practicum; they are clustered into skills in each of the following areas: Preteaching Skills, Teaching Skills and Post teaching Skills. A listing of the competencies and documentation is provided in the Practicum Handbook.

The student and practicum supervisor schedule at least four observation sessions for the semester in which the clinical practicum is planned. Wherever possible, observations are scheduled for sites in nearby locations to reduce supervisor travel distance and time. During an observation visit the supervisor spends at least one-half day in the practicum student's classroom to observe and evaluate teaching and discuss the student's progress in competency attainment. The supervisor maintains contact by telephone or visit with the master teacher. S/he writes a summary evaluation of the students overall strengths and weaknesses in teaching, reviews all documentation provided by the master teacher and assigns the final grade.

The Practicum Handbook summarizes all requirements, procedures, and forms needed to document and evaluate competencies. The initial preassessment of competencies is jointly determined by the practicum student, the cooperating teacher and the practicum supervisor. Knowledge competencies are met by satisfactory completion of prescribed coursework for the area of specialization with a grade of B or better in each course. Performance competencies are assessed by a behavioral Q-Sort form on which students rate their proficiency on specific program competencies indicating in which areas of teaching they excel or need improvement. The preassessment process permits the practicum student to develop an Individual Personnel Training Plan (IPTP) outlining those competencies which must be demonstrated during the practicum experience to satisfy university requirements. The IPTP insures recognition of competencies acquired through on-the-job experiences while providing opportunity to practice and refine other skills to improve the student's overall teaching ability. Students are required to maintain data on their progress in achieving each of the targeted competencies by indicating the amount of classroom time spent and the type of activity engaged in.

The student and master teacher agree upon a weekly schedule for observation sessions and interviews. During observation sessions, the master teacher spends at least one hour in the practicum student's classroom to evaluate teaching and validate practicum competencies. During interviews the master teacher and student discuss the students

progress (in person or by telephone) in competency attainment, strategies for improving classroom teaching, and other problems. The master teacher documents that all fifty (50) program/competencies have been demonstrated and that target competencies selected by the student for the ITP have been completed. S/he writes a summary evaluation of the student's overall strengths and weaknesses in teaching and submits all documentation to the practicum supervisor.

Program Organization and Delivery

On-the-job practicum experiences are offered to all eligible students in the western and northern counties during the Spring semester, and the eastern and southern counties of the WVU service area during the Fall semester of each year. This scheduling facilitates assignment of practicum supervisors from the university and avoids travel across the most mountainous and least accessible areas during severe winter weather conditions.

Once eligible students have been identified, project staff contact county school systems to locate qualified master teachers to serve as cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers are trained to provide guidance, suggestions, and constructive criticisms to practicum students on an on-going basis. They are also trained to observe teaching, offer supervisory feedback, and evaluate teaching competency within the clinical supervision model. To be eligible to supervise practicum, cooperating teachers must meet the following criteria:

1. possession of a valid West Virginia teaching certificate in the area of special education specialization in which the practicum is to be conducted;
2. teaching experience of at least three academic years in the area of special education specialization in which the practicum is to be conducted;
3. completion of a Master's Degree in Special Education in the area of specialization in which the practicum is to be conducted;
4. authorization from the superintendent of schools of the district in which s/he is employed for release time from instructional responsibilities for the purpose of supervising practicum students;
5. participation in a training workshop for acquisition of skills in using clinical supervision competency assessment procedures.

When all practicum students and cooperating teachers have been identified, project staff assign practicum supervisors to oversee practicum activities for groups of students in a given geographic area. Practicum supervisors maintain periodic contact with student and master teacher, provide assistance in completing required activities to document competency demonstration, observe and evaluate the student in the on-the-job classroom setting, and assign the final grade.

The Special Education Program provides practicum supervision following techniques of the clinical supervision model (Acheson &

Gall, 1980; Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, 1969), which focuses on observation and evaluation of teaching to foster professional learning and growth (Garman, 1986). Measurement of performance in terms of behavioral objectives (Piper & Elgart, 1979) allows practicum supervisors to make data-based decisions about student acquisition of program competencies. Arranging for observation of students in their work settings allows the program to take advantage of an optimal setting for demonstrating and proving teaching skills (Grant et al., 1979; Russell, 1971). Clinical supervision of students on-the-job permits project staff to offer more realistic and functional training experiences for special education teachers.

Project staff have designed materials and procedures to train field-based master teachers in skills of observing, supervising and evaluating teaching competencies. Materials include videotapes of classroom teaching sessions to observe and critique, roleplay activities to practice supervisory feedback and consultation skills, and simulation activities to discuss problems encountered in supervision and evaluation of teaching. All materials were based on actual teaching situations to be found in special education programs in West Virginia schools and on those problems typically encountered by practicum supervisors in on-the-job settings.

Project staff conducted three (3) training sessions for cooperating teachers in addition to the pre-practicum orientation session. Training sessions were held at several regional sites within reasonable traveling distance for a group of teachers for a three-hour session one evening per week for three successive weeks. Training sessions included lecture/discussion activities guided practice, and probe assessments. Cooperating teachers who participated in training sessions received graduate credit and a stipend to cover the costs of participating in the training.

The initial training session focused on observation skills. Project staff did (1) present observation practices and forms, (2) elicit teacher scoring of observation forms via videotape, (3) conduct a discussion and comparison of ratings/comments, (4) guide teachers through another scoring with a second videotape, (5) conduct additional discussion and critique, (6) then administer a probe assessment of observation skills using a third videotape. The second training session focused on supervisory skills. Project staff did (1) present clinical supervision practices, (2) elicit teacher demonstration of skills through roleplay, (3) conduct a discussion and comparison of methods, (4) demonstrate supervision skills through a second roleplay, (5) conduct additional discussion and critique, and (6) administer a probe roleplay of supervision skills using a third roleplay for each teacher trainee. The third session focused on evaluation skills. Project staff did (1) present evaluation practices for documenting and summarizing teaching competencies, (2) elicit teacher demonstration of skills through simulation activities, (3) conduct a discussion with comparison of comments, (4) guide teachers through another evaluation, with a second simulation, (5) conduct additional discussion and critique, and (6) administer a probe assessment of evaluation skills using a third simulation.

Training procedures used the collaborative consultation model to develop skills of observation, supervision and evaluation (Idol,

Paolucci & Nevin, 1986). Cooperating teachers developed skills of (1) active listening, (2) problem solving, (3) feedback and (4) consultation (Conoley & Conoley, 1982; Heron & Harris, 1982; Warger & Aldinger, 1986). Learning activities that focus on guided practice with constructive criticism were stressed (Cooper, 1985; Friend, 1985; Warger & Aldinger, 1984). Teachers have been encouraged to use a peer model of supervision with primary emphasis on provision of support, guidance, and encouragement of self-assessment rather than a traditional model of critique, evaluation and judgement, since the proposed model develops teacher morale and improvement more effectively (Borko, 1986; Heishberger & Young, 1975; Joyce & Showers, 1982).

Evaluation Procedures

This project was initiated in Summer 1987. The following evaluation procedures have been proposed:

Formative Evaluation

Project staff will monitor cooperating teacher acquisition of skills in observation, supervision and evaluation of teaching on a continuing basis. After each visit by the cooperating teacher s/he will complete a self-rating form on skills and the practicum student will also rate the cooperating teachers supervisory performance. All written lesson observation forms and the summary evaluation form will be content analyzed. Comparisons of these three ratings during and after training for each cooperating teacher will be made using an interrupted time series design. Feedback will be given to each cooperating teacher on supervisory performance by the practicum supervisors at intervals throughout the practicum and upon its completion. The supervisor and the student will also complete a program evaluation form rating the effectiveness of the cooperating teacher across the practicum experience. All these rating forms will be coded, summarized and analyzed by computer.

Summative Evaluation

Data collected from all operational years will be used for summative evaluation purposes in determining if the project was effective in developing program competencies, to what extent the training procedures were successful in developing supervisory skills, whether the project was successful in decreasing teacher shortages, and to what extent the model is a workable alternative for teacher training programs.

1. Evaluation of Accomplishment of Project Goals

- a. Competency acquisition by students will be monitored by project staff who will maintain data on the number and criterion level of competencies validated during and after practice to determine that all students demonstrate adequate teaching competencies upon completion of the program;
- b. Field-based master teachers and supervisors will be evaluated via direct observation and review of written observation and evaluation forms by project staff, as well as by informal

interviews and structured course evaluation forms completed by students.

- c. Impact of the project on teacher shortages will be assessed through records on the number of applicants, number of students, number of program graduates, number of graduates employed, number of graduates certified, employment location of graduates, and number of pupils served by graduates, and length of graduate employment.

2. Evaluation of Cost-Efficiency of Model

Cost accounting procedures will be used to monitor all project activities. Expenses will be assigned to development (of materials and procedures) or to program operation. Program costs per trainee served and per credit hours completed will be compared to the same cost categories for more traditional programs.

Ongoing Evaluation

Data collection procedures for the project will be incorporated into the existing evaluation plan for personnel preparation programs within the WVU Special Education Program to insure continuous monitoring and assessment of program operation in the future and to provide an information base for decision making. The on-going evaluation program consists of periodic assessment of student competency acquisition, program operation, and graduate performance. Measurement procedures designed within the Discrepancy Evaluation Model (Provus, 1971) are used to collect data from students, faculty, cooperating professionals, graduates and employers as input for decisions concerning development and modification of graduate teacher training programs in special education. Programs and program components that meet a performance criteria of 75% effectiveness are considered acceptable within this model.

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